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4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

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PHYLLIS GEORGE: When terrorists move into action against the United States, it's natural to ask about U.S. intelligence gathering: What did Washington know and when did it know it?

Two men who know the intelligence operation inside and out are joining us this morning. In Philadelphia at WCAU-TV is Admiral Stansfield Turner, who ran the CIA during the Carter Administration. In our Washington Bureau is James Schlesinger. He was CIA Director in 1973 before becoming Secretary of Defense. And with him is our Washington correspondent, Terence Smith.

TERENCE SMITH: Gentlemen, let's talk about the situation and capacities of our intelligence in the Middle East right now. Obviously, it's been severely tested.

The question is, what is our capacity to confirm information of the kind we're looking for right now, such as: Who were the hijackers? Where are the hostages held? What is the real connection between Nabih Berri and the hijackers? These specific things which are so hard to get at, and yet are the essence of what we're dealing with right now.

Admiral Turner?

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Well, Terry, I don't think that we could have predicted this hijacking. I don't think that this kind of a group existed long enough and we would be capable in the time permitted to penetrate it and get somebody inside it to know they were going to go to Athens and do that.

I certainly hope that after four and a half years in

office, with all the emphasis this Administration has placed on Lebanon, that we've got some informants inside the Shiite community who can be giving us a general idea of who these people are, if not their specific plans.

SMITH: Let me ask Mr. Schlesinger whether or not at this stage in this kind of continuing dilemma it's likely we can come up with that sort of information.

JAMES SCHLESINGER: Well, you set a very high standard: confirmation of who is holding these people, who has planned this operation.

We do not have the capacity to confirm. We may, as the Admiral indicates, have a general idea. We may have clues. But confirmation is quite demanding. I doubt that we have that capacity.

But more important than that, even if we knew precisely who it was, it's not clear what we can do. The hostages have been dispersed to various homes. There's no easy way to ferret them out. And there is nobody, as Mr. Arens has just indicated, on the other side with whom we can positively deal.

SMITH: Are there practical ways, Admiral Turner, for us to even locate where the hostages are, that sort of physical specific information?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think it would be very difficult to be sure we had our hands on all 37 of them who are not at the airport.

Yes, we should be able to identify where some of them are because, again, as I say, I hope that we've been able to et some informants inside the communities in Beirut.

But the chances of doing anything about that, as Jim Schlesinger has just said, are very slim because, first of all, they can move them on a daily basis. And the opportunity to go in and rescue them is just not there. It's too difficult.

SMITH: We have all read press reports that the U.S. intelligence infrastructure in Lebanon was gravely damaged in April 1983 when the embassy there was blown up and many of the key people were killed in that incident.

Is that true? And has it been rebuilt since then? Either of you?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I don't think that one should confirm or deny these things. But if it were true, we have had

sufficient time since then to rebuild the intelligence infrastructure. And we should have done so. As the Admiral indicates, it's been a high-priority target.

SMITH: Admiral, there was also the suggestion that we lost considerable intelligence information and capacity when the Palestinians were forced to leave Beirut and Lebanon. Is that correct?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, any situation like that, you can have a changing environment. I don't know whether we lost it during the Palestinian departure. But there's been lots of time since then -- it's been almost three years -- to rebuild. And certainly we had a broader base than that, I would hope.

SMITH: We also have had in recent days extraordinary terrorism acts, apparent terrorism acts, such as the destruction of this Air India airplane over Ireland and the incident in Tokyo yesterday. Are these the sorts of things that U.S. intelligence ought to be able to have an inkling of? Mr. Schlesinger?

SCHLESINGER: I don't think that one can demand too much of intelligence. What we have to have is a security procedure at airports that can deal with the planting of a bomb. But intelligence may or may not get hold of this kind of thing. If we are fortunate, indeed, those clues will come through intelligence. But one cannot count on it.

SMITH: Admiral Taylor? Turner. Excuse me. Admiral Turner?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I would certainly agree with that. One has to try. One has to not only set up one's own networks, but pressure other countries to set up theirs and trade information with us. But the odds of getting a mindless terrorist act like yesterday's with Air India are very, very slim.

SMITH: Very slim and very difficult.

Gentlemen, thank you, both, for this insight into that world.